

# THE MEASURE

## A JOURNAL OF POETRY



Poems by George O'Neil, Kenneth Slade Alling,  
Edwin Ford Piper, Frank Ernest Hill, Hart  
Crane, Margaret Tod Ritter, and Others — —

Reviews of Hazel Hall and Hervey Allen — —

Further Prejudiced Words on Amy Lowell — —

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## Contents

	Page
<b>POEMS</b>	
In a Theatre. By George O'Neil.....	3
Passers-by. By George O'Neil.....	4
The Mother. By George O'Neil.....	4
Stones Gathered for a Chimney. By Kenneth Slade Alling.....	6
The Bee. By Kenneth Slade Alling.....	6
Summer Night. By Kenneth Slade Alling.....	6
Something Like a Wind. By Kenneth Slade Alling.....	7
Volcano. By Hilda Conkling.....	7
Tea Time. By Emmy Veronica Sanders.....	8
The Cow. By Emmy Veronica Sanders.....	9
Tramp Songs. By Edwin Ford Piper.....	10
Quicksilver. By Grace Hazard Conkling.....	12
High Mountains. By Frank Ernest Hill.....	13
A Persuasion. By Hart Crane.....	14
Sculpture. By Margaret Tod Ritter.....	14
 <b>IN REVIEW</b>	
Poems of a Mystic. By Carolyn Hall.....	15
A First Book. By Louise Townsend Nicholl.....	17
Further Prejudiced Words on Amy Lowell. By Maxwell Anderson..	18

# The Measure

*A Journal of Poetry*

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Number 8

October, 1921

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## In a Theatre

I CANNOT tell why, in this casual hour,  
Your beauty should seem strangely new to me  
Who learned so long ago unhappily  
The strangeness of all beauty . . . and its power.

Now in the half-light of this crowded place  
Where life distils its unreality,  
I cannot help but watch you covertly,  
For nothing is less real than your face. . . .

And nothing so inexorably true  
As these sharp radiants that leap and flare  
Like tones of music on unbounded air  
Enkindled as I turn to look at you.

A whisper as unvarying as death  
Measures the pauses that the actors mark;  
The listeners are breathing in the dark. . . .  
O beauty, the monotony of breath!

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## Passers-by

O YOU who do not heed me as I go  
Along my myriad unmeaning ways  
More than you heed the first light fall of snow  
Flurrying through this deep December haze!

Oh, are you not aware as well as I  
That every vibrant sunward pointed tree  
Shall someday shatter into dust and fly  
Less tangible than foam tossed from the sea?

Have you not thought how every stone and star  
May vanish? that no vague or certain things  
Are less explainable than we two are,  
Are more eternal than a bird that sings?

Now in us both there is a flame that glows  
At the brief sad grasping of a friendly hand,  
For the insistent shading of a rose  
And all the truth we do not understand;

And yet we glance and go indifferently!  
And probably you would not care to know  
That some one breathes this quiet litany,  
Passing you . . . in the silence of the snow.

## The Mother

WE held a spray of laurel to her lips;  
Laurel and columbine she wore for cloak.  
She crushed a berry with her fingertips  
And watched the swallows blowing from an oak.

Her eyes were like the shadows where the leaves  
Of a young almond touched a quiet brook;  
They held the silveryness of peace that weaves  
Patterns of doubt for idleness . . . she took

A tendril of her bright hair from a breeze  
That lifted it and carried it like rain,  
Snaring it in the radiant laurel trees;  
Eve coiled its vibrance on her brow again. . . .

"Adam," she said, "what dost thou think of Cain?"  
Her husband, cutting thongs of tensile birch,  
Frowned as his chiseled stone slit into pain. . . .  
Eve called his eyes to their perpetual search.

"What should I think of Cain? He herds the sheep,  
And, with his brother, helps to keep this place  
Rid of loud beasts when there is time to sleep;  
He is as cursed as we and void of grace."

Eve answered, "I have watched him on the hill  
Driving the timid flock at dawn and night  
As though defeated panthers he would kill  
Fled, sharpening his hatred with their fright.

"His brother is not so; he dreams too much  
While the few sheep we have stray far from here;  
He loves to listen and to look and touch. . . .  
He will not walk where flowers are not near. . . .

"And I have seen Cain's eyes, when thou hast spoken  
A word of praise to Abel for his work,  
Flare with the color of a snake-gourd broken,  
And at his mouth lines like the hawk's claw lurk."

- Adam's gaunt fingers, quiet on a bough  
Of vivid birchwood, tightened to a grip,  
A rock in shadow was his forehead now,  
An edge of lightning flashed upon his lip.

"I thought that thou hadst seen . . ." said Eve, and turned  
From one pure shoulder to the other's rest.  
Above her in the leaves a parrot burned,  
Scarlet and purple on an emerald nest.

*George O'Neil*

## Stones Gathered for a Chimney

THESE are less soluble in time,  
    that slow, slow acid,  
than you or I or any of the tall trees here:—  
these gray faced stoics  
come out of earth's wind opened caves.  
They know a dull endurance:  
a harsh undissipated life is in them,  
like night in an abyss.  
They learned resistance in that early thunder blow  
which spilt the universe to separate stars,—  
and you and I who go  
above them now  
shall shortly lie below.

## The Bee

SO heavy laden he can scarcely fly,  
    He labors like a ship that sails against the wind;  
And with his passing all the flowers seem thinned,  
As the great bee summer hovers slowly by.

## Summer Night

LIKE a bell note shivered into fragments of fine sound:  
    The summer night. But silence and the stillness do astound  
Me more than all this strange-go-round  
Of multitudinously minted chords along the ground.

This is an edifice of silence, vast:  
Into the chinks of silence sound will creep  
A little while—and fall asleep,  
Its strength being spent and past.

They say the crickets sing all night:  
I know  
They strike against the walls of silence,  
Insistently, a futile blow.

## Something Like a Wind

NOW almost menacingly and not in mirth,  
As "Rain is for the roots," loudly he calls,  
The wind goes shaking out the leaves, that earth  
May lose no drop of all the rain that falls.

Often I think that something like a wind  
Wanders to spill a greyness like the rain,  
Along the earth whose surface is my mind,  
Intent on nourishing old roots of pain.

*Kenneth Slade Alling*

## Volcano

IN Mexico a mountain stands alone.  
It looms above me . . . a joy strikes my heart . . .  
I see its transparent colors, its long opal hair. . . .  
But the moon would make it shine . . .  
A heap of silver.  
My thoughts are gone from me  
Because of that splendid trembling iridescent thing . . .  
I know it will fade,  
I know it must go.  
Songs float over its crest,  
Dusk is coming on . . .  
*I will touch the mountain!* . . .  
My fingers touch air.  
The broad bright country sways in folds  
Like long slow waves . . .  
If all the hills were water rising and falling  
This would be the highest wave,  
This would be the white-hooded wave . . .  
This would be the great wave for sea-gulls to follow!

*Hilda Conkling*

## Tea Time

THE door creaks faintly. Shutting out the gloom  
    Of the long dark hall,  
The child tiptoeing enters the large familiar room  
Filled with fragrance of roses and strongflavored tea.

From the tall elms that border the old canal  
Through open windows, quietly,  
Filters the soft green dusk—  
And the little orange flames under the spirit lamp flicker and play  
Over the shining silver tea things on the lacquer tray.

The voice of the drowsy City  
Sounds muffled and vague as if from very far—  
With now and then the sharper rattle of a lumbering car  
Over the cobblestones of the old vaulted bridge.

Under the elmtree foliage the low barges lie moored  
With their deckloads of flowers in boxes and pots—  
Pansies, heliotrope, forget-me-nots  
And rows of purple fuchsia and colorless mignonettes.  
And between the barges' darkening silhouettes  
Here and there you catch a gleam  
Of the pale stagnant stream.

In the strong scents of flowers and damp earth  
And the rich golden fragrance of tea  
Lingers a stale tepid odor of decay and death.  
Exhalations from the old canal  
And the City's feverish impure summer breath.

And in the peace of the old duskfilled room  
A sudden longing poignantly seizes the child  
For dimly visioned beauty undefiled  
In dimly visioned worlds that strangely loom  
On far horizons. . . .

## The Cow

YOU beautiful blackspotted one  
Turning unblinking eyes on me  
Across the hedge—are you aware  
Of me and my identity?

The pussy-willows sway and nod,  
The proud slim poplars are aware  
Of birdlings feathery in the nest—  
You chew the cud and stare—and stare—

Under the trees the sweet blue grass  
Caresses your soft glossy hide.  
On the canal the wide patched sails,  
Above your head the spring clouds glide

Over an eggshell china sky,  
In the pale water by the mill  
That turns and slowly turns—while you  
Chew the soft cud and gaze your fill.

There is a menace in your dark  
Moist eyes that see, yet do not see.  
There is a menace in that stare  
Of vacant cold placidity.

Some women are like that—and Life  
Gazes just so, unblinkingly,  
Vacant and still, and unaware  
Of self and its identity.

*Emmy Veronica Sanders*

# Tramp Songs

## UNDER ROOF

**T**HE road is long, it has no end,  
Weary traveller.  
A hard, hard road if you got no friend,—  
*Rain—rain on the roof.*

A fearful road on a pitch dark night,  
Lonely traveller.  
For the wind and the rain they growl and bite,—  
*Rain—rain on the roof.*

The nightbirds wail, the wild beasts cry,  
Lonely traveller.  
And ghosts on the moaning wind go by,—  
*Rain—rain on the roof.*

Tell your tale while the storm is loud,  
Weary traveller.  
Pipe smoke for an incense cloud,—  
*Rain—rain on the roof.*

## BALM

**T**HE balm is lush, the soil is rich,  
And purple asters blow  
Between the hedge and the roadside ditch  
To watch men come and go.  
*And it's fare you well,*  
*I am left alone.*

The wind is loud and the wind is low,  
And the leaves say, “hush and hush,”  
To the ripening hours of afternoon  
When a warbler sings or a thrush.  
*And it's fare you well,*  
*I am left alone.*

They saw where the traveller laid him down,—  
The dove and the cuckoo,  
The balm and the feverfew,—  
To slumber deep in a long, long sleep,—  
Balm in the moonlit dew,  
Balm in the moonlit dew!  
*And it's fare you well,  
I am left alone.*

#### OLD MAN WINTER

**G**O down the road, and down the road  
By leafless hedge and willow;  
And stretch your bones on the frosty ground  
With shoes to make a pillow.  
But it's south, boys, south!  
Run away from old man winter.

*"O rain come wet me, sun come dry me,  
Wind o' winter don't come a-nigh me!"*

It's late to limp by hill and plain  
In rag o' coat and breeches;  
The dogs they chase me out of the road  
And hunt me down the ditches.  
But it's south, boys, south!  
And run from old man winter.

*"O rain come wet me, sun come dry me,  
Sleet o' winter don't come a-nigh me!"*

I follow the duck and the mourning dove,  
I'm headed south for winter;  
I'll throw my feet on a Dixie street  
Or lie in jail for the winter.  
And it's south, boys, south!  
Away from old man winter.

*"Rain come wet me, sun come dry me,  
Moonlit snow, O don't come a-nigh me!"*

### QUARRYMAN'S JOY

O a half-pound rock in a Rockford sock  
Is the joy of the quarryman;  
A little swing with the handy thing,  
And it's rise up if you can.

You may come from Kerry, and come from Cork,  
Or the county of Tyrone;  
Big Bohunk, or Dutchman drunk,  
You fight with the sock and stone;  
Leave knife and gun to the buggers that run,—  
Fight with the sock and stone.

It's in your sleeve when the police come,  
You hear the whistles blown;  
It's in your hand when the Wops have come,  
Fighting for your own.

Old beer bottle will cut and gash,  
Iron will bust the bone;  
Hickory leg, or stake, or peg  
Is good to make 'em groan;  
Knife and gun for the buggers that run,—  
Fight with the sock and stone.

*Edwin Ford Piper*

### Quicksilver

I GO lonely . . . I go lost . . .  
It is hard walking along these beaches  
And the sea forever tugging the sand out from under my feet. . . .  
It is hard remembering how proud I used to be  
And you grudging me a love that at its best is no more than quicksilver  
Always slipping away and away. . . .

*Grace Hazard Conkling*

## High Mountains

HERE in July melts the last snow; a few  
Climb then, like us, to get the view.  
We are so far from any road or trail,  
Alone with storm-blanchéd cedar, jagged peak,  
So far from where men toil or speak  
We seem to tread the air  
High, high, where all things fail  
Save space, fearful and mute,  
Wondrous as God and savage as a brute—  
Treachery, awe, divinity, despair.

No rush of warm, familiar love can wake  
For these hard crags, this dusk of pungent wood,  
This sudden, wild blue lake.  
No man has put his life with theirs,  
Laughed, sobbed beside them; none has understood  
Their life: he only understands who shares.  
They are as far from all the earth we know  
As fiends or angels are from men.  
Our knowledge of them shrivels to a hope.  
    Their glow  
Is strange as is their melted snow;  
    We come again, again,  
We are always alien, questful; nothing here is home.  
The things from which we come,  
    The streets, the house-hung slope,  
    Even the seas,  
Somehow companion us. But these  
Are strange as clouds, untasted love or hate,  
Or life beyond some closed and monstrous gate.

—*Frank Ernest Hill*

## A Persuasion

IF she waits late at night  
Hearing the wind,  
It is to gather kindnesses  
No world can offer.

She has drawn her hands away.  
The wind plays andantes  
Of lost hopes and regrets,—  
And yet is kind.

Below the wind,  
Waiting for morning  
The hills lie curved and blent  
As now her heart and mind.

*Hart Crane.*

## Sculpture

MY own heart's heart, lie still and let me trace  
The crescent moons divinely wrought in thee.  
For one creative hour let me be  
A master sculptor, wakening thy face  
To rapture. Let me memorize the way  
The white cheek curves into the brow; the turn  
Of chin and throat and shoulder. Let me learn  
The sweep of moon-white breasts. Belovéd, lay  
Thy lips on mine. Tomorrow I shall kneel  
Beside a block of marble, I who fain  
Would raise thee gently up to breathe again  
In pallid stone. From head to crescent heel  
I shall retell thy beauty. Let me now  
Drink beauty from thy lips and throat and brow.

*Margaret Tod Ritter*

# The Measure A Journal of Poetry

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## *Poems of a Mystic*

*Curtains, by Hazel Hall. John Lane Company. New York.*

**T**HIS book does what it sets out to do, creating its own distinctive atmosphere and sustaining it throughout, spelling a hush through which the quietest footfall sounds and sounds again, as in the poem called "Footsteps":

They pass so close, the people on the street;  
Footfall, footfall;  
I know them from their footsteps' pulsing beat;  
Footfall, footfall;  
The tripping, lingering and the heavy feet;  
I hear them call:

*I am the dance of youth, and life is fair!*  
Footfall, footfall;  
*I am a dream, divinely unaware!*  
Footfall, footfall;  
*I am the burden of an old despair!*  
Footfall. . . .

It is not a great book and the personality it reveals is neither great nor robust. It has no marked originality, and no technical triumphs. On the other hand it has no grave faults. It is a cool little book, telling hardly anything of love and nothing of passion. But these poems of a woman whose life is bounded by the four walls of her room and released through the curtained window, are filled with a strong mystic sense and a rich valuation of the shining that is in static life. "Sunlight Through a Window" will show what I mean.

Beauty streamed into my hand  
In sunlight through a pane of glass;  
Now at last I understand  
Why suns must pass.

I have held a shadow, cool  
Reflection of a burning gold,  
And it has been more beautiful  
Than hands should hold.

To that delicate tracery  
Of light, a force my lips must name  
In whispers of uncertainty,  
Has answered through me in a flame.

Beauty is a core of fire  
To reaching hands; even its far  
Passing leaves a hurt desire  
Like a scar.

In "Flash" mysticism goes a step farther than itself and the result is a vision that is the most far-reaching thought in the book:

I am less of myself and more of the sun;  
The beat of life is wearing me  
To an incomplete oblivion,  
Yet not to the certain dignity  
Of death. *They cannot even die*  
*Who have not lived.* . . .

The worst thing about *Curtains* is its arrangement. The first half of it, which makes up the section called *Curtains*, is the best part, and it is most unfortunate that Miss Hall spun out a whole second section on *Needlework*. There are individual poems in it which are very nice, but the vocabulary of sewing is necessarily limited and it grows tiresome to read poem after poem based on "stitches" and "needles" and "thread." I feel that three or four, or as many as half a dozen, of the needlework poems scattered through the first part of the book would have eliminated this effect and given the reader a much better chance to enjoy all the poems.

There is a delightful, quiet sense of humor in "Filet Crochet," one of the needlework poems. I wish it might have kept Miss Hall from putting in her fly-leaf note which essays to explain her blending of metrical and irregular forms in certain of the poems. Technique which cannot accomplish its purpose without being labelled should certainly be scrapped.

Part Three, *Spring From a Window*, has only four poems. Three are insignificant and would better have been left out. "Foreboding" is all of April it is necessary to see through this window.

*Carolyn Hall*

## *A First Book*

*Wampum and Old Gold*, by Hervey Allen. The Yale Series of Younger Poets. Yale University Press. New Haven.

HERVEY ALLEN has already done better poems than those contained in this slim first book. So often it happens that by the time a first book is published (if the author has the questionable good fortune of having it accepted as soon as it's ready) it is no longer a fair representation of the author's work. The fact that this book hinges around the war, being divided into poems written in France at the front in 1918 and those (some of them reminiscent of war) written since, also detracts from its absolute value in this particularly war-weary period in literature. But, for all that, the flavor of what may be expected from this young Southerner is here.

When Mr. Allen gets away from the sheer sound of his words, which sound is too often reminiscent of several other poets of an older day, he begins to approach what he himself can really do. When he looks around him he is much better than when he shuts his eyes and listens within. When he accurately reports he is better than when he inaccurately echoes.

There is beauty, for instance, in the last part of the "Autumn Invocation" of "The Seasons":

Lady, how often must I ask it?  
Proud plenty, if you will, with vine-wreathed basket  
Shall bring you offerings of damasked plums—  
For you in orchards mellow peachesplash  
All night.  
The lichens whiten on the lonely ash,  
The clover blackens and the last bee hums.  
*Autumn, come down,*,  
You brown-skinned sorceress,  
And witch the leaves, for harvest home  
And bear the nodding sheaves  
Into the red barns by the little town.  
*Autumn, come down, come down!*

But very much better than the "nodding sheaves" do I like the first stanza of "When Shady Avenue was Shady Lane" with its descriptions of the white ducks paddling in the summer rain, the tollgate by the spring, and the gatekeeper in his dog-eared hat. "The Old Judge," with its exquisite appreciation and interpretation, its very tender touch upon something old and rare and fragile, comes also in this newer, fresher group and is, to me, the finest thing in the book.

The youthfulness of both "Confession," with its couplet,

I think, by God! It is no lie:  
I shall go dreaming till I die!

and of "Despair," written to his mother, which says:

I am not what you gave your life to buy,  
And God knows what I shall be by and by!

are not belied by the youthfulness of the whole book. But their intensity and headlong sincerity and as yet unchanneled energy tell of stronger, better work to come.

*Louise Townsend Nicholl*

### *Further Prejudiced Words on Amy Lowell*

Have you room in "The Measure" for a comment on "A Prejudiced Word on Amy Lowell"? The adjective is disarming in its frankness, nevertheless the situation is not quite saved.

It seems that before originality of any kind in any art can be accepted, the audience at large must pass through two stages. The first consists in the offhand announcement: "No technique whatsoever, but the message is clever in its own way." Then an increased familiarity demonstrates that there *is* method in the technical madness, and the second stage is reached: "Clever technique, but nothing whatsoever to say."

Obviously "The Measure" has reached the second stage. May it continue its path!  
*S. Foster Damon*

**M**R. DAMON classifies me as a certain kind of critic going through a certain phase and taking a certain attitude toward Amy Lowell because she is a certain kind of poet. In truth I have no stock attitude toward any school of verse, nor do I recognize Amy Lowell as one of a school of poets. Any poet of excellence is an isolated and powerful individual, unless my philosophy leads me astray, and, though often founding, may never follow a cult.

Amy Lowell is no exception. She has created a style to fit her personality. Her technique is her own, and she is extraordinarily effective within limitations. She is limited, as I pointed out, to the creation of static and decorative beauty. It is not style, creed, cult, or technique that prevents her from dealing with action and emotion. But she doesn't deal with them—that much is apparent.

I fear Mr. Damon based his generalization on one instance—the instance of his controversy. Who else has said about what other poet, to adopt his somewhat misleading paraphrase: "Clever technique, but nothing whatsoever to say"?

*Maxwell Anderson*

## Who the Contributors Are

KENNETH SLADE ALLING is, unexpectedly, a New York business man. He has lived in India for several years, and was an aviator during the war.

EMMY VERONICA SANDERS is a Dutch writer of verse and criticism. She is now in Holland, after having lived here for several years.

EDWIN FORD PIPER, whose poems in this number are from the songs scattered through a book of narrative poetry called "Casuals" which he is preparing, saw a great deal of the tramps who passed through his Middle West country when he was a boy. He is a professor of English at the Iowa State University. Everyone who has heard him read his poems hopes that the reading trip which he is thinking about for this winter will materialize.

GRACE HAZARD CONKLING is going to give lectures and readings this winter as well as going on with her teaching at Smith College. A new autographed edition of her little daughter Hilda's book, with a new photograph of Hilda, will be out in a few weeks.

HART CRANE, who is twenty-two years old, lives in Cleveland, O.

MARGARET TOD RITTER is a young woman now living in Colorado Springs.

## An Addition to the Measure Staff

HERVEY ALLEN, of Charleston, S. C., has just joined the staff of *The Measure* as an associate editor.

# The Measure

*A Journal of Poetry*

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